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SUBJECT: MINOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES DECRY LACK OF
TRANSPARENCY

¶1. (U) At a meeting with fifteen minor presidential candidates at the Crystal Hotel, Ambassador Carney faced a barrage of complaints and concerns from the slate of candidates. Some even threatened to hold demonstrations or boycotts of the election if their concerns are not addressed. In response, Ambassador Carney re-affirmed America's commitment to partnering with Afghanistan to achieve free and fair elections and assured the group that the election would take place as planned on August 20. He urged candidates to consider the future of Afghanistan and their own interests in deciding on courses of action. End Summary.

Elections Won't be Free and Fair

¶2. (SBU) The candidates, led by Mohammed Esmael Qasimyar, the first vice presidential candidate for Hedaiat Amin Arsallah, used their meeting with Ambassador Carney to lodge a series of complaints about the upcoming election. The chief complaints stemmed from the candidates' fears that the election would not be transparent, that President Karzai is abusing his power by having ministers and governors campaign for him, and that the IEC is not independent but controlled by Karzai cronies who will all land top jobs in the next administration. Candidates raised the issue of money in the campaign several times, and they also lobbed allegations that the top-tier candidates were spending millions on their campaigns, with no indication of where the money was coming from. Candidates claimed that international funding, including from NGOs, is being misused and that top candidates are also receiving money from drug smugglers and intelligence agencies.

System Stacked Against Them

¶3. (SBU) As the election draws to a close, the minor candidates insisted that the international community had lavished attention on the top three candidates and had made a major mistake by not meeting with the other candidates. Some even alleged that the top candidates are using international assistance to fund their campaigns. When candidates host lavish campaign rallies with gifts and food for their supporters, no one questions where the money is coming from, they said. They blamed the IEC for turning a blind eye to the issue of money in the campaign. Further, they said that the IEC should be renamed because it is not independent, that it has been unresponsive to their concerns, and is instead working on behalf of certain candidates. The preeminence of the top three candidates in the eyes of the international community, they alleged, is damaging to the future of the country because the top tier are just warring amongst themselves and not providing any vision on how they will lead the country.

Protests Promised

14. (SBU) In what appeared to be a half-hearted threat, the group asserted that if the IEC and international community fail to resolve the problems they outlined before election day, they are considering staging wide-scale demonstrations or even urging their supporters to boycott the election because they do not believe the elections will be free or fair. They demanded a guarantee that there will be full participation of the Afghan people on election day and that the attempted interference of neighboring countries in the election will be stymied. Dr. Mohammad Ali Nabizada, Ashraf Ghani's second vice presidential candidate, emphasized his fear that weapons are streaming across the borders to the north and west of Afghanistan, forecasting violence on election day sponsored by Afghanistan's neighbors.

Committed to August 20

15. (SBU) In response to the concerns raised, Ambassador Carney emphasized above all that the election will take place as planned on August 20. He said that the international community is here to act as Afghanistan's partner in the elections, but stressed that this is Afghanistan's election and that it is the Afghan people's responsibility to ensure the best possible election for the future of Afghanistan. Acknowledging the candidates' threat to boycott the election, Ambassador Carney stated that it is up to them to decide to participate in the election and help build a new future for Afghanistan or to stay out. He reminded them of the thirty

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years of war the country has experienced, and how this election represents their future. In a plug for the ECC, Ambassador Carney encouraged candidates to bring their complaints to the ECC, which he said would soon be issuing public responses to many of the complaints filed so far. The ECC represents the future of fair elections in Afghanistan and all candidates should work to strengthen it, he argued. He addressed security concerns by saying that there is significant coordination being undertaken between international forces and the ANSF to provide security on election day. Fraud remains a top concern, he said, and he asserted that any election officials who perpetuate fraud will be breaking the law. While he acknowledged that some may try to get batches of ballots, claiming they are for the women of their household, he noted that the electoral authorities are aware of this illegal practice, and hoped such incidents would be few, also expressing his hope that people would begin to move away from voting on ethnic lines and more on issues. It is for the Afghan people to decide, he said, to create the conditions to make the elections free and fair.

EIKENBERRY